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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 000271

SIPDIS

NEA/FO, NEA/MAG (PATTERSON/HAYES);  
HR/OE/PC (CORINNE APPLETON)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/29/2019

TAGS: [APER](#) [AMGT](#) [AFSN](#) [TS](#)

SUBJECT: EMBASSY TUNIS NOMINATION FOR 2009 DEPARTMENT OF  
STATE FOREIGN SERVICE NATIONAL OF THE YEAR AWARD

REF: STATE 27006

Classified By: Ambassador Robert F. Godec for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Embassy Tunis is pleased to nominate Senior Political Specialist Jamil Halfaoui (JA-MEAL HAL-FOW-WEE, FSN 11/12, PSA) as its candidate for FSN of the Year. During 31 years of government service, Jamil's hard work and dedication have directly supported the USG's policy initiatives in Tunisia. Jamil devotes himself to advancing USG interests at significant personal risk.

¶2. (C) Government of Tunisia (GOT)-affiliated newspapers have publicly warned Tunisians to avoid "superpower foreign embassies." Many of Jamil's contacts are often harassed, arrested, and even beaten.

¶3. (C) Jamil himself has become a target: a Tunisian court sentenced Jamil to four months in prison, on a five-year old charge for which he had twice been previously found not guilty. The judiciary is not independent, and the GOT often uses the courts to punish activists. After reviewing the facts of the case, the Embassy was concerned that the case may have been politically motivated, punishing Jamil for his efforts to help advance democracy and human rights. Despite the threat of prison (the sentence was eventually suspended but public prosecutors can appeal that decision at any time), Jamil weathered the pressure and continues to excel at his job. His long-term dedication, in the face of adverse conditions, warrants recognition at the highest levels.

¶4. (C) Jamil's knowledge and insight expanded the depth and breath of the Embassy's activities and reporting. As a result of progressive restrictions on GOT officials' foreign contact put in place by the Foreign Ministry, GOT counterparts have become increasingly reluctant to meet with diplomats without express permission from the highest levels. This significantly hampers the Embassy's ability to operate in Tunisia. Jamil, however, reaches out to the many contacts and friends he has made and persuades them to meet with us. When the Ambassador held a series of roundtables prior to the American elections, Jamil convinced reluctant invitees to attend. When the GOT actively discouraged Tunisians from pursuing Middle East Partnership Initiative local grants, Jamil convinced new organizations to apply. When relations with key political contacts foundered because of these contacts' opposition to US Middle East policy, many boycotted Embassy events; Jamil persisted in debating the difficult issues, and found ways to convince them of the advantages of engagement with USG officials.

¶5. (C) Jamil's honesty and discretion instill trust. His ability to address sensitive issues without offending have allowed him great access to groups as diverse as former political prisoners, feminist activists, and retired ministers. With his seasoned diplomatic skills, Jamil makes these contacts feel welcome, which is critical to our outreach. The Embassy turns to Jamil for background, insight, and information on the latest developments on

sensitive issues like corruption, unemployment, human rights, and elections. His knowledge of the personal histories of Tunisia's movers and shakers is invaluable -- and necessary -- when determining how best to effect change.

16. (C) Proposed Citation:

(Note: Because Jamil Halfaoui is still subject to GOT retribution for his work to advance democracy and human rights, Post would ask that such a citation be used only on condition that the award is kept confidential.)

(a) Option 1 (if the award is kept confidential): For outstanding service in the advancement of democracy and human rights

(b) Option 2 (if the award is made public): In recognition of consistently outstanding service.

Godec